

CASTLEBURY COTTAGE

YE OLDE STYLE HOSPITALITY

By David Morrison

The enduring visual and emotional appeal of castles is not difficult to understand. On the one hand they are intimidating fortresses, often dominating their locale from a dramatic elevated location. Atop their lofty positions they exude a compelling mystery and foreboding territorial authority. And that so many remain perfectly intact and functional hundreds of years since their construction simply reinforces the notion of their impenetrability.

On the other hand, they evoke the mystical and romantic. Images of the knights, fair maidens, wizards and dragons of fairytales are summoned by the breath-stealing grandeur of their architectural ingenuity. Just one look at such as the extraordinary Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy, France, or Burg Hohenzollern above the town of Hechingen in Germany, and the imagination cannot help but run riot.

As far as I'm aware there are just four buildings in Canada that can officially claim to be classed as castles. The oldest, built between 1833 and 1835, is Dundurn Castle in Hamilton, ON. Toronto boasts the impressive Casa Loma, while the remaining

two are Craigdarroch Castle in Victoria and Hatley Castle in nearby Colwood.

But perhaps the community of Chemainus would contest that there is, in fact, a fifth Canadian castle? An utterly delightful, themed accommodation, Castlebury Cottage certainly offers guests more than a flavour of Arthurian romance, the attention to period detail throughout its interior capturing ancient days with authenticity enough to cast one back in time.

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From the colour and texture of the walls and wooden fixtures to the subtle lighting and trappings of stately opulence, every effort has been made to reproduce the physical features and ambience of a medieval castle, or thereabouts. Particularly pleasing about this presentation is that it is in no way cheesy or off-target. Everything within it works a treat!

The living-dining room is located down a short hallway directly from the front door, opening out to the right where the kitchen is accessed via a rampart-topped archway. The main source of natural light

is a stunning lead-latticed Gothic lancet window, under which a circular dining table sits. When my wife and I stayed in Castlebury Cottage's Camelot Suite (the smaller Sonnet Suite is situated downstairs), we found two earthenware goblets awaiting us on said table, and a satin jester's hat casually draped over the back of one of the two dining chairs. (Yes, we did try it on. No, you cannot see the photos.) That there are just the two chairs speaks

volumes about this accommodation, a romantic fantasy getaway in the extreme.

The dining set and all other furniture throughout Castlebury Cottage are or look antique, adding considerably to the genuine feel of history around you. Save for obvious modern life accessories such as the (cabinet-disguised) TV and DVD player, see-through fireplace and kitchen appliances, everything in Castlebury Cottage looks from bygone ages or is intended to remind you of same. These include many carefully placed ornaments, books and other treats all clearly aligned to the inescapable fancifulness of their surroundings. Wandering around to discover them one by one is an experience to cherish, so I dare not reveal much here, but the one thing I will say is that they all point to L.O.V.E.!

This ultra-retro experience is enhanced in so many ways. Where wood appears, for example, crackle painting gives it a time-weathered look. It's an effect also employed on certain of the walls, in tandem with other skilled painting techniques to give them a flattened or distressed appearance. Others are roughly finished in white plaster and frescoed,





Photos: Greg Samborski

looking just as aged. These lovely textures are set against a backdrop dominated by shades of gold and variations on a theme of medieval royal purple.

In adornment there are plaques, ornate wall-mounted lanterns; a magnificent chandelier; statues of knights and entwined lovers; ornamental harps and a suit of armour named Sir Lancelot. He was apparently a prop from *The Addams Family* series, purchased by this folly's creators in a Hollywood memorabilia auction. I'm sure Ol' Lancey'd agree that "In Camelot, we are one" —just as it states above the fireplace ingeniously warming both living room and bathroom at once.

The bedroom and bathroom are separated only by a wide archway, but as one space form the true focus of this epicurean escape. The canopy bed is huge with purple velvet bedding and gold scatter cushions. It looks straight into the amazing bathroom, the obvious focal point of which is the exquisite onyx soaker tub and marble surround. The tub is under a wall bearing a fresco mural emblazoned with the opening line of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's classic love poem: How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...

But like all good castles, it also has lookout points to keep an eye open for approaching enemies or other pesky parties intent on disrupting the sensual mood. One balcony overlooks the road for vagabonds on foot, but the other provides a good view of the sea. From here, any marauding Vikings or their troublesome ilk attempting a sneaky invasion will be

spotted in good time. In peacetime, it's simply a nice place to gaze upon the ocean with a loved one.

This fabulous B&B was for eight years the indulgence of its previous owners, Virginia and Larry Blatchford. Inspired by the châteaux seen while on vacation in Europe, Larry transformed the existing building to its remarkable current form in

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1999. Personal touches have been added and a few cosmetic changes made by the present owners, Margaret and Peter Jones, otherwise it remains as was.

The Jones' took over Castlebury Cottage and its residential parent property, Birdsong Cottage (in which one room is also rented), in November 2007. Former educators now enjoying retirement, they'd been looking for an interesting retirement business-hobby for some time.

"We'd been living in Sooke in a really nice house," Peter began in explanation, as he and Margaret served us a delicious breakfast of juicy poached pears followed by stuffed crêpes and ham. "But the trouble was it was miles from anywhere. And we were at the end of a road on a clifftop, so no-one ever drove past us, so

we were beginning to feel like hermits. We were missing people, essentially! So this seemed like a good project to meet some interesting people."

Their new purchase had had a varied and colourful history, as Margaret told us:

"The bare bones of it were built in 1902 and it's had several lives since then. It was a holiday home for a wealthy Victoria family. Then a Japanese businessman bought it for his family and out the back was the bunkhouse for his workers, connected to here (Birdsong Cottage) by a bathhouse. Then in '42, of course, the Japanese were moved out and the place had several owners until the late fifties. Then in the early sixties a biker gang took it over. It got quite a reputation, called 'The Haunted House' at one point! Then a subsequent owner had an outside aviary with four hundred birds in it, and then Larry and Virginia bought it for a song. That's as far as we know!"

In 2009, Birdsong Cottage and Castlebury Cottage are the decidedly uncontroversial, yet so apt home business for a charming English academic and his scholarly Scottish wife. They're having fun with Larry's whimsical folly while meeting guests from all over the world in the process. What a lovely life that must be... and, after all, what is life without a little fantasy now and again? ■

For information on bookings for Castlebury Cottage or Birdsong Cottage, contact Peter and Margaret Jones by email: info@castleburycottage.com or phone: (250) 246-9910. Full details are also at the Castlebury Cottage website: cstleburycottage.com.

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